

## Facilities for providing litter: litter boxes and scratching mats

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The EU Council Directive in which minimum standards for laying hens are laid out, states that when enriched cages are used litter must be provided to the birds. The litter can be provided on scratching mats or in a litter or dust box. In order to compare the use of both facilities for dust-bathing direct observations should be used. During two consecutive laying periods the two litter facilities were compared and the number of dust-baths as well as their duration was registered. The litter boxes were attached to one side of the cage and were raised 20 cm above the bottom of the cage. In front of the box a perch was placed to facilitate access for the birds. In the cages where scratching mats were used the litter boxes were removed and the mats were placed on top of the wire cage floor. Both facilities were provided with litter (sawdust or a mixture of sawdust and feed) once a day. Through observations it became clear that the dust-bathing behaviour in the two facilities was very different. More dust-baths were registered on the scratching mats but these dust-baths didn't take as long as those performed in the litter boxes. An explanation for this difference is the accessibility of the facilities which differ. When choosing a facility in which the birds can dust-bathe the design of this facility is important. However, in the context of animal welfare it is not quite clear which system to choose: the one where more animals get to dust-bathe or the one where they get to dust-bathe longer.

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